



WHEN GENDER INTERSECTS WITH CLASS: TAKING 'MASCULINITIES' INTO PICTURE

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ABSTRACT

It is common to talk about girls and women when one talks about policies for 'gender equality'. But then what about men and boys? Are all of them oppressors and at a superior and privileged position in society? The answer is 'NO!'. Just as girls and women are 'stereotyped' and conditioned in a 'patriarchal' society into being submissive, dependent, polite, emotional etc., boys and men are stereotyped as brave, independent, rational/logical, aggressive etc. This kind of conditioning put an additional pressure on them to survive in a society practicing the notions of 'hegemonic masculinities' to continuously 'justify' their gender. The observations made in an all boys' school, reveal that education of boys belonging to low socio-economic backgrounds gives very low expectations and 'hope' to them and many deviate to crimes as well as substance abuse. Therefore, this paper is an attempt to include masculinities in the study of gender.

KEYWORDS: gender equality, social-cultural reproduction, 'masculinities'- hegemonic, subordinated and marginalized, 'lads', counter-school culture.

INTRODUCTION:

"The difficult thing to explain why working class kids working class jobs is why others let them. The difficult thing to explain why working class kids working class jobs is why they let themselves" (Willis; 1977).

The statement here refers to the cycle of reproduction that operates in our society which reproduces the class and status of a person to which he/she belongs. Various reproductionist theorists (Bowles and Gintis; 1976, Bourdieu and Passeron; 1977 and Willis; 1977) stress upon the processes which lead to this reproduction of classes. Some, like the 'Functionalists' (Durkheim; 1893, Parsons; 1937) think this process as 'natural' and according to them, society operates in a system and categories which should be maintained for its proper functioning. But critical theorist like Marx, Althusser, and Adorno identify this inequality which arises from the 'political agenda' of 'haves'. Now who does this inequality affects? Does schooling and education have the power to diminish these categories and treat all equally or it is just maintaining the status quo? It has been proven that schools and the education system which are parts of the capitalist society help in maintaining this inequality through the political 'ideology' of the state. It is further strengthened and proven by the different types of schooling in our society where children belonging to different socio-economic status study. Bowles and Gintis's (1976), stress how educational structures act as 'selective and allocating devices' for the social reproduction of the class structure in our society.

"The function of school, they argue, is to produce a differentiated, stratified and conforming work force, adjusted in personality and character, equipped with the necessary skills and competencies to work in the socio-economic division of labor" (Arnot; 2002, p. 25).

The schooling system in our society is also divided into many sections- private elite schools where children of the 'upper class/ 'haves'/ good socio-economic background and who have that 'cultural capital' study, which is also valued by the stakeholders (policy makers, textbook writers, school administration, teachers etc.) of the education system. Another division of the school system is the 'Government' school which is, in today's times, inhabited by children of daily wagers, laborers, domestic servants, small and local businessmen or even slum dwellers. Kumar (1985) refers to this as the 'early selection' where children are put in schools according to their parents' status and from where differentiation of class starts and is maintained through schooling and then job market.

In a study done in the all boys' school of Delhi, observations were made about the administration and processes that goes in a government school. Now, why here are we talking only about all boys' school when we talk about the intersection of social class reproduction and 'gender'? When we encounter the word 'gender', it is often associated with girls and women, their status, issues, the abuse they face in the present society and the policies related to them. But what about boys and men living in the society? They are usually considered at the privileged/superior position in terms of hierarchy between men and women and who possess all the resources of a 'patriarchal' society where women are given a status of second-grade citizens. But have things become better by focusing only girls and women in making of policies and frameworks to curb gender inequality in society? There is also a need to question whether all men are the same and in a privileged position?

Scholars and thinkers researching and studying about men and masculinity (Connell; 2000, Willis; 1977, McRobbie;) as well as gender do not think so.

Apart from the literature, one can observe from their everyday lives whether they are always benefitted in this patriarchal society or not? The answer is not simple and also not completely positive. Coming back to the area of gender and education, there are very few studies which have included boys and men, but are quite in number in the West. People like Willis, Connell, and McRobbie etc. were among those who initiated studies on masculinities and included men in the study of gender due to increasing focus on girls and women and neglect of boys and men. It was realized that it was not only women who got affected by the system of patriarchy, but it put a lot of influence on the socialization of boys and men and inequalities between men and women increase due to this socialization.

If girls are socialized to be polite, docile, soft-spoken, submissive by the society, then boys are too brought up to be brave, independent, physically strong and not to be weak. If there are dos, there are don'ts too in rules and regulations ascribed by the society. Researchers have identified the socialization of boys to be stricter than girls as the former are not allowed to be weak or cry; they face the challenges set by peers – of same age as well as older, have to prove their prowess in order to establish their identity and survive in the contemporary world of capitalist competition. They are expected to earn money and take the family's responsibility. Processes which were observed during the research done in all boys' schools as well the co-educational ones; there were constant fights among boys- the 'less powerful' and the 'more powerful'-in order to prove their masculinity. While the 'more powerful' possessing what is called the 'hegemonic masculinity' (Connell; 1995); enjoys power, leadership and dominance; the 'less powerful' (the 'subordinated masculinity') gets disheartened and continuously subverted while studying in the school. There are many cases of drop-outs due to this in boys schools too if similar cases happen with girls in co-educational schools. Therefore, there exist various types of masculinities among boys and men and a power relationship between them operating in a hierarchy. Boys who go against the school system and 'break rules' or 'create mischief' are called 'lads' by Willis (1977) and 'protest masculinities' by Connell (2000). This way it becomes a 'counter-school' culture where lads find every possible way to oppose the school system and administration. Violence, sexism, substance abuse and racism then become a part of this counter-school culture (Gordon; 1984).

Boys and men belonging to the lower socio-economic backgrounds in our society (India) face this inequality in the processes of schooling too where they are looked down upon by the teachers and administrators of the school. According to them, such boys will only follow the profession that their parents did before them and do not really have a possibility of a better career. Parents of students who were observed in the all boys' school were laborers, artisans, small shop owners or mechanics, auto-drivers, tailors, vegetable sellers, construction workers, electricians, sweepers, painters, carpenters, etc. Some did not even have a father. They are ridiculed to such an extent by the teacher about their parents' occupations that they feel ashamed to even speak about it. These boys, according to teachers and principals are notorious, those who don't want to study and are not well behaved. This they believe is because they belong to such backgrounds where there are no etiquettes and a 'cultural capital' which is valued by the society. The crimes which are done to girls and women in society are also, according to them, committed by such boys as they also don't respect women.

To respect and value girls and women in a patriarchal society have become a problem for boys and men across all classes. This is because the society in which we live always teaches men to see women at a position inferior to them. 'She don't go out for work', 'is always at home', is not 'logical/rational/smart', her 'anatomy is

her destiny' and she exists only to 'serve men'- who have a 'mind' which is logical and rational to operate the society. Media also play an important role in creating the image of women as only 'an object'- in advertisements, movies, porn etc. where boys are also conditioned to see women in the way they are treated in their homes or in the media. Kumar (1986) illustrates how growing up in a single-sex school made girls and women an 'enigma' to them. It was observed how boys in an all boys' school are disheartened by the school system which was unable to provide them 'good education' as there was dearth of teachers as well as discipline in the school. Younger boys were also reported to be abused by the elder boys both physically as well as sexually.

It was seen how life in an all boys' school and in general is very tough for the boys as they have to continuously prove their masculinity at every step. In a group, they play as well as fight with each other. There is a leader in them who is physically strong and others remain at his mercy or have to establish their power by winning in a 'fight' among the two. There are occasions when 'fights' were organized to see who is more powerful. Whereas it is seen boys are taught to 'be away' from girls in order to avoid 'being polluted' as their image is created in their minds. But when they grow up, their interest in the opposite sex as well as their 'sexuality' is heightened. It was seen that boys talked more about 'sexual things' than girls do. They used to manipulate words that come in the lesson while teaching and do actions that connoted 'sexual' meanings.

Coming back to the 'lads', who were 'hegemonic' in the school not necessarily in terms of academics but 'physical strength'; they were observed to have bunked classes, trespass the school gate or the wall, disobey teachers etc. Sometimes it was reported that the school wall was broken down by the boys in order to run through. They roam in streets, chat, laugh, tease others, talk about people, events, girls, things etc. Cases were reported about children consuming cigarettes, alcohol as well as drugs from teachers as well as the police who used to find such cases of children from the all boys' school. Boys who dropped out of school were seen getting involved in crimes too in order to get money or for substance abuse. Connolly (1997) terms such boys as 'hardened identities' who lose their hope in the society as well as education which, according to them, had the ability to change their status and condition in which they live but is not able to do so as society values the culture of the 'dominant class' and devalue theirs.

Boys in all boys' school were saddened by the fact that their school runs in the evening shift where education is not taken seriously by the teachers and the administration. Also teachers there had very low expectations from such students who according to them will ultimately do jobs that are passed on from their family and will not do anything great. On the contrary, boys thought that the girls' school was operated more efficiently and was more disciplined. Therefore, according to them they were treated unequally as education was not given keeping in mind the job market and the skills needed to get into it. As MacLeod (2009) puts it, the system of education "tailors the self-concepts, aspirations, and social class identifications of individuals to the requirements of the social division of labor" and Connell (2000), terms such boys as part of the 'marginalized masculinities' oppressed by the capitalist patriarchal system.

Till date, whenever a policy on gender is formulated, it is made for to defend girls and women from the atrocities of society and alleviate them from the status of second-grade citizens. But what about boys and men? As we have seen above, not all boys and men are the same and in privileged position. They too are subdued by the pressures caused by 'stereotyping' in a patriarchal society where they are expected to be breadwinners of the family as well as protectors no matter what their situation is. There is no doubt that girls and women in India, especially from non-privileged background still lack basic opportunities in terms of education and the right of marriage of their own choice and time. But one cannot overlook the education of boys which is deteriorating gradually making them more vulnerable in the society. We cannot bring equality in society unless both the genders are catered too. In fact when we talk of gender, there are not only two genders-men and women; but a complete spectrum called a 'third gender' who are also marginalized in the society to a great extent where their identities are not accepted in the society. Therefore, if India is a democracy, it should enable equal opportunities for all genders of the society and integrate them completely.

There is an utter need to look into the dynamics of 'forms of masculinities' in order to understand the hierarchy as well as power relationships that exist among boys and men and the challenges, problems and issues that arise due to that. As there are counseling and self-defense sessions arranged for girls, same must be open to boys who also face many issues of harassment as they grow up. There are many cases of bullying which went ignored in case of boys as they are assumed to be strong and expected to be able to deal with it. Contrary to this belief there arise many cases of depression and suicides among boys too due to ragging and bullying. In India, there is a dearth of studies on men and masculinities which hinders proper formulation of policies and intervention for bringing gender equality in the society. Therefore, by including boys, men and 'masculinities' in the problem of 'gender equality', one can really transform the society in which we live in as they have to contribute equally in making the society democratic where everybody has equal rights to live as an 'integrated identity'.

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